

May 1983

A.E. Res. 83-18

PRODUCTIVITY IMPROVEMENT IN NEW YORK STATE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS: STATE ACTIONS TO ASSIST LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

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Summary

The local government structure in New York State is one of the oldest in our nation. While willing to face change and to meet the demands of the future, local governments in New York cannot function alone, for they are units of the state. In order to improve productivity and provide public services more economically, the state and local governments will need to strengthen the bond among themselves and learn to be increasingly responsive to each others' particular roles. This need for an improved dialogue between the state and local government was of primary concern to local government officials. They saw the need for greater levels of input into the decision-making process at the state level which affects them. The establishment of an Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) or similar organization patterned after the restructured Office for Local Government, was endorsed by those interviewed. This organization would serve an advocacy role for local government, providing input to the state decision-program development process and better analytical evaluation of state decisions which affect local government.

Further strengthening of state-local relations in the form of greater technical assistance from the state was also called for. In order to improve productivity in local government, local officials need to be aware of what can be accomplished. Many of these local officials are part time and cannot keep abreast of new financial or management techniques. Many local governments are too small to implement these techniques on their own. What is needed is increased technical assistance, information, and training from the state in areas such as computers, law, accounting and management. For example, assistance from the state in helping a number of small communities hire a circuit-rider manager or in updating their accounting procedures could provide instructive illustrations of possible improvements in local government productivity.

A common concern voiced by all was that of state mandates and their impact on local government. While the state's role in initiating programs was understood, two specific issues relating to mandates were raised. One was that of the increased financial burden placed on already fiscally strained local governments by new mandates. Lack of funding or the decline in funding over time rested heavily on local government. It was felt that the state should study more closely the impact of new legislation on local governments. The second issue raised related to the number and inflexibility of new laws. New York State probably has the largest set of laws relating to local government of any state in this country. A great number of these laws direct local governments to perform a function in a specific manner, usurping the local home rule powers. While it is agreed many of these new laws have merit, what is needed is greater flexibility in their implementation. The state should spell out standards to be met and leave the method of achieving these standards up to the local government.

Finally, consolidation of services played a central role in the development of this study. While consolidation can and has proven to be quite successful in saving money and improving productivity, there are concerns about the extent to which consolidation efforts should proceed. Financial savings can accrue directly to a local government that, for example, consolidates its police or fire departments. But there may be diminishing returns to scale, for as you consolidate a service, while gaining financial rewards you are also giving up local control over that service. Consolidation efforts must be weighed in terms of the economic versus political tradeoffs that result from such an effort.

Introduction

While productivity improvement in local government is by no means a new concern, renewed interest has been shown by state and local government officials and professionals in New York State in increasing the efficiency of public services and reducing the costs of government. This concern has been rekindled by taxpayers demanding less taxes and less government while at the same time new and improved public services; the rising costs of providing these services; new mandates from the state and federal government imposing greater responsibilities upon local government; and a host of other fiscal and management pressures.

The purpose of this study was to assess how and where the State of New York could assist its local governments -- county, town, city and village -- in reducing costs and promoting more efficiency in the delivery of public services. Efficiency was defined to mean an improved level of service, a reduced cost of delivering a service, or a combination of both.

The impetus and support for this study came from Assembly Republican Leader James L. Emery and his Republican colleagues in the New York State Assembly, who were concerned about the need for more information regarding the thoughts of local governments on these issues.

Some of the initial concerns which were to be addressed in this study were the feasibility of joint or shared services by local governments, consolidation of services, state legislation or procedures which may be a hindrance to bringing about efficiencies in service delivery, contracting for public services, possible success stories of productivity improvement programs across the state, and general government management issues.

It was agreed that due to the nature of local government issues in New York State the sphere of concern of this study would include all general purpose local governments except the state's larger cities. The decision to leave these larger cities out of the study was made because it was felt that the problems and concerns of the state's smaller units of local government differed from those of the larger cities. This study focuses primarily on the smaller local government units in the state.

With this general objective and initial concerns, the study itself was divided into two topic areas: the first dealing with general issues

and concerns about productivity improvement in local government expressed by local government officials in the state, and the second dealing with four specific public service programs -- public health, police, fire, and highways.

While a number of local governments in New York have initiated productivity improvement programs of different types, there still exists the need for continued efficiency and cost reduction improvement. This study is based on issues and concerns as perceived by local government officials and professionals across the state and is a compilation of their individual statements. For lack of a better expression, this is a "grass roots" study whose primary source is the men and women who manage local governments in New York State.

Methodology

Once the objective of the study was determined, it was decided that the most effective method of gathering the necessary information would be through direct interviews with local government leaders. In the time period available to perform the study a questionnaire survey would not have produced adequate results.

The interview method which was chosen to identify influential leaders in each type of local government and in each public service program area can best be described as "power structure theory." This method relies more on personal intuition and professional reputation to identify leaders and issues than on any type of specific social research methodology. The "power structure theory" involves identifying a network of "generalists," those individuals in the state having a broad familiarization with individual leaders in the specific areas of concern. From these generalists a list of names is collected of leaders in the topic area and also their perceptions on the question of local government productivity improvement. These leaders or "specialists" are then contacted and interviewed. They are asked questions pertaining to the general objective of the study, as well as to identify members of their peer group who they feel should be interviewed. This distinction between generalists and specialists is important, because oftentimes their perception of an issue may differ, especially its importance or priority. In developing a list of leaders to interview in each topic area, a cross section from all geographic areas of the state was sought. Both personal and telephone interviews were used to collect information for the study. These interviewing methods both proved to be extremely successful. It should be noted that although careful attention was given to obtaining as correct a sample as possible, due to time and technique limitations it is possible that certain "networks" of local government leaders were not included. It is hoped that any gaps in this study will be filled in through continued dialogue over these subject areas.

One example from the study of the "power structure theory" may help to illustrate its use.

To identify leaders in county government in the state, contact was initially made with the New York State Association of Counties in Albany. A meeting was held with staff members of the Association in which a preliminary list of leaders was identified, as well as important concerns of the Association relating to productivity improvement. Other names of influential county leaders were obtained from meetings with Department of State staff and New York Conference of Mayors staff. Telephone and personal interviews were then conducted. Interviews began with an introduction on the purpose of the study -- how the state can assist local governments in cutting costs and providing services more efficiently, and then asking specific questions raised from the preliminary list of concerns and building on issues raised in earlier interviews. This methodology proved to be very successful and the majority of individuals interviewed required little assistance in making known specific areas for improvement.

The number of interviews conducted in each topic area consisted of between ten and twenty people. The number of individuals contacted in each topic area varied because interviews were conducted until responses on specific areas for productivity improvement began to duplicate themselves.

Through the use of the "power structure theory" method, influential and knowledgeable leaders in local government from across New York State have provided firsthand information on specific means to improve the productivity of local government.

General Issues and Concerns

While the questions that were asked local government officials were similar, the responses from representatives of each specific type of local government (city, county, town and village) in New York State were often quite different. Many of the problems and potential solutions to productivity improvement and fiscal matters cut across all four types of local governments, while some are particular to only one type. The issues raised by officials of each type of local government will be discussed separately.

County

While originally established to perform specific functions as directed by the State, the last 25 years have seen counties undergo major changes in their powers and function. The counties now provide a broad range of public services, many of them taken over from other local governments within their borders, due to their supposed ability to more efficiently and economically deliver the services. As economic conditions put more pressure on local governments to assess their public service delivery system more closely, we may see even more of this. As stated in the Department of State's Local Government Handbook, "... the counties today have taken on a vast array of new duties and functions in response to the demands of an urbanizing society. The result has been the development of county governments in New York which can assume and perform new duties and functions as ready-made structures for providing and

financing services on a regional basis -- the region in each case consisting of the cities, towns and villages within the county."

Eleven county government officials were interviewed, ranging from a Board of Supervisors member to county executives and budget officers. Individuals from both charter and noncharter counties across the State were contacted.

The one single fiscal measure which was mentioned in all interviews that would most greatly influence cost savings at the county level is state assumption of all medicaid costs. Medicaid is the largest and fastest growing budgetary item. Total agreement was expressed for state assumption of the local share of medicaid costs. With the takeover of medicaid costs by the state, substantial expenditure reductions and lower real property taxes would most likely be seen in all counties. Several of those interviewed mentioned that these savings would be used to finance some much needed capital improvement projects, as well as be directed toward other services and tax reductions. The recent proposals of President Reagan under his "new federalism" to have a federal takeover of Medicaid costs may change the priority of this issue.

Another issue mentioned frequently by county officials was human service delivery. The majority of human service programs in the state, outside of New York City, are delivered by the county. These are mostly mandated programs from the state or federal government. County officials see a need for more adequate levels of state funding for these programs. Recently state funding has dropped as the state tries to hold down its costs, and the financial burden for maintaining these programs has been left with the counties.

Related to this issue, those surveyed stated the need for more flexibility for the counties in administering state programs such as human services. In order to meet the intent of the law, state regulations are often too rigid and do not allow a county enough opportunity to serve the particular needs of its residents. The difficulty in writing regulations to meet the needs of a state with such diverse areas as New York City and rural Adirondack townships in it is understood. Counties want the prerogative to meet the intent of the law but in such a way as to adapt it to the particular local needs.

Two important issues repeatedly brought up which directly affect county government operations were state mandates and fiscal notes. County officials stated they want less interference by the state through fewer mandates. They see state mandates as providing an increased burden for counties. Of particular concern is the fact that mandates imposed on local government should have greater or full state funding. It was also mentioned that proposed pieces of new legislation which mandate new responsibilities on county government should be reviewed using a fiscal impact statement to determine the real costs for counties.

Other fiscal concerns were the current cap on revenue sharing. Support was expressed for the reinstatement and maintenance of the state revenue sharing program. Also mentioned by those surveyed was the need for reexamination of the property tax assessment system in the state, including the variety of exemptions which are granted and their local impact,

and the need for final resolution of the real property assessment issue. The Tompkins County county-wide tax assessment office was mentioned as a model for other counties to follow.

All individuals interviewed were in favor of considering various alternatives for consolidation of services, cooperative agreements, and contracting for services. Many of them mentioned areas of consolidation in their counties which have proven to be quite successful. These include landfills/solid waste, roads, and sewer and water services. It was stated that disincentives currently exist in the state aid formulas which reward spending and penalize saving achieved through merger or consolidation of services. A system to reward innovation and productivity improvement is needed. Another barrier is that even though officials may agree in principle on the need for consolidation of services, many are unwilling to risk the final step. Help is needed to show that consolidation does work, and state assistance in reviewing potential costs and impacts of productivity improvement efforts would be beneficial. It was felt that once more local government officials are able to see the potential savings which may accrue from consolidation of services, the barriers against it may break down further.

It was noted that one specific piece of helpful legislation in this area would be the power for city-county consolidation. This has been successful in a number of places across the country.

One final concern mentioned was support for the creation of a State Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations or similar body to act as a "voice" for local government in relations with the state. It was felt that an ACIR type agency would serve as an advocate for local government interests and provide additional input into state actions which may affect local governments.

Town

Of all local governments in New York State the most numerous and diverse are town governments. Towns in suburban areas provide a full complement of municipal services, while some towns in rural areas mostly maintain roads. For the most part towns are small governments. The current fiscal pressures have caused towns to adapt and work closely with other neighboring local governments in providing public services. If the individuals contacted in this study are a good representation of government officials, this willingness to adapt to change will only strengthen the future of local government in New York State.

Nineteen town government officials were interviewed. The majority of these individuals were town supervisors, although a couple of town clerks were interviewed when supervisors were not available.

A wide variety of issues were raised by these town officials. Some of these were similar to those raised by county government officials. These include concern over too many state mandates and too little power for local governments. The need for state funding of mandates and the use of fiscal notes was also expressed by those surveyed. Not enough flexibility in state regulations to meet the varied needs of different town governments was also mentioned. The cutback of state revenue sharing

was a common concern, as was the inability of the state to develop new legislation for real property assessment.

There were a number of specific concerns directed at the state which those interviewed thought caused confusion and increased cost for town government. One of these concerns was that state regulations are always changing, and it is difficult and costly to keep up with these changes. Another was that more and more responsibility in managing affairs is being taken away from the town by the state. The desire for more home rule and a greater amount of local control, through fewer state mandates, was repeatedly brought up. It was also mentioned that there was too much unnecessary paperwork from the state and that it was difficult for part time town officials to keep abreast of it. Some officials mentioned the possibility of hiring a full time assistant or of towns jointly hiring an assistant. One positive statement that was often repeated was how helpful the State Department of Audit and Control Division of Municipal Affairs is and that state auditing is a useful tool for town officials.

In responding to questions about intergovernmental cooperation, contracting and consolidation of services, all town officials stated that this is something that has been going on for years on both a formal and informal basis. Towns cooperate in many ways, from purchasing new equipment to building a joint sewer project. Examples of joint purchase of highway equipment and joint development of landfills were most often mentioned. The single largest budgetary item in town government is highways. One supervisor stated that "there's our highway department and the rest of the town." Most towns have informal arrangements for sharing highway equipment and even work crews. One important concern related to this was that of liability. For example, if a person gets injured or killed while working in another town, which jurisdiction is responsible? This informal sharing also occurs in other areas, for example, in financial record keeping, where more experienced towns may assist other towns in their record keeping. It was also stated that town officials do not know enough about intergovernmental cooperation and how far they can go with some of these arrangements. Many mentioned that it would be helpful if they knew more about the laws and what other places in the state were doing.

While most town officials expressed positive reaction to cooperative arrangements, there were officials who were opposed to it. One reason was that, "If you jointly purchase a piece of equipment, it's never around when you need it."

Some individuals stated that if the state got involved in these informal cooperative arrangements among local governments, it would only cause confusion and problems. It was felt that the informal arrangements which have worked well for so long would be hampered by state legislation.

Among the more specific suggestions for state assistance in the area of productivity improvement, agreement was expressed by those interviewed over the need for a greater level of technical assistance. Areas in which assistance is needed include training programs, small computers, budgeting, personnel management, capital programming, grantsmanship, contingency accounts, accounting, and insurance. Also mentioned was the

need for more information on leasing equipment and on the state laws for joint purchasing and cooperative agreements. Many of these areas mentioned were of specific concern to the smaller towns who often felt left out because they do not have the expertise to apply for grants or are unaware of new money investment strategies. The need for more professional management of town affairs was brought up. A full time supervisor or circuit-riding manager was suggested. It was felt by some that the Division of Community Affairs in the Department of State should be expanded to provide this technical assistance to local governments.

There were a variety of other issues brought up. Unions, collective bargaining, and the Civil Service System were all mentioned as causing a loss of local control in dealing with employees. It was mentioned that inadequate management personnel are available due to Civil Service limitation. Labor negotiations were often expensive and time-consuming. The large number of special districts -- sewer, water, light, fire protection -- and how they are taxed, what areas they service, and who controls them was a source of confusion which seemed to hamper town government operations. Many individuals stated that purchasing through the state was not advantageous. It is often not the cheapest price, service personnel are too distant, and the time it takes to get the equipment is too long. Competitive bidding was also a concern. Some of those interviewed alleged that it often adds to the cost of equipment, because all the studies needed cost money and the studies are often more expensive than what is needed.

Suggestions were made about looking into the possibility of towns pooling funds not needed immediately in order to get higher interest rates. Also suggested was a pool of equipment to be maintained by the county or state from which local governments could draw.

One final issue raised by town officials was that in some counties supervisors are no longer ex officio members of the county legislature. It was thought that this has led to a breakdown in communication between the county and the town.

City and Village

The results of interviews of city and village officials are combined in this study. The principal reason for this is that these governments are represented by a single association, the New York State Conference of Mayors; thus, in doing the preliminary work on these types of local governments, issues relating to both types were often considered together.

This study dealt with the smaller cities in the state, those with a population of around 50,000 or less. As stated earlier in the study, this was done because the problems and concerns of these smaller cities are often less publicized compared with their larger counterparts.

Fourteen city and village officials were interviewed. The majority of those contacted were mayors from cities and villages ranging in size from 50,000 to 1,000 in population.

Again, many of the issues that were raised by city and village officials were similar to those mentioned by county and town officials. Among these were fiscal notes and state mandates without adequate funding. The amount of excess paperwork that part time officials have to do for the state was mentioned. The fact that smaller cities and villages seem to get the short end of the stick in terms of grants and aid was brought up. Overregulation by the state and little flexibility in administering programs were subjects of concern, as well as more local control over local affairs. The capping of state aid and no state plan or formula for distribution of money, leaving cities and villages with an uncertain revenue picture, was an often mentioned concern.

Among some of the specific fiscal concerns was "double taxation," since village residents must not only pay village taxes but town taxes as well. Many of those interviewed felt that the state should make a decision on this issue once and for all. Some officials felt that it would be helpful to them and also reduce state expenses if there were an annual audit. State-authorized property tax exemptions impose increased burdens on those not receiving the benefit of the exemption in the municipality. Those surveyed felt that exemptions such as these must be more carefully reviewed and, if needed, state reimbursement made to the municipality. Mentioned by almost all those interviewed was the need for more technical assistance and training from the state in such areas as grantsmanship, legal matters, small computers, accounting, capital programming, and economic development. City and village officials mentioned that it would be nice if there were a toll-free number they could call if they needed assistance. Many of those interviewed expressed the desire to have a professional administrator available. Some mentioned the possibility of a circuit-rider.

Insurance was an issue that was brought up several times. Confusion was expressed over the need for public officers' liability insurance and risk management. Those interviewed also stated that competitive bidding for insurance had not proven successful. Many officials were not able to get the particular coverage that they needed in this way. Comparative shopping proved more effective. Municipal insurance pooling was mentioned as a way of providing more flexibility and for combating rising costs.

Much interest was expressed over the need for cooperative agreements and consolidation. Again, many of these activities have been going on for a number of years on an informal basis. Those interviewed felt that what was needed was broader latitude in city and village ability to contract for services, such as police, fire, and highways. The ability to contract with other neighboring local governments to provide specific services could be a cost-cutting measure. Related to this is a proposal that a village and town who are providing the same service contract with each other. The consolidation of police and fire departments was mentioned, as was the increased use of auxiliary police. It was suggested that towns should be able to have fire departments or at least to be able to jointly manage a fire department with a village. In terms of consolidation, most agreed that it would be helpful to have some studies available showing how consolidation has worked. While many towns and villages in the state are consolidating both services and government, more cost savings through consolidation may occur if officials have better information to make decisions on the subject.

From a labor-management relations standpoint, there were a number of concerns. High on the list was the mandate for retirement benefits. Many officials wanted to be allowed to adopt a different retirement system. There was opposition to compulsory arbitration for police and firefighters. Also mentioned was the question of whether both unions and civil service are necessary. Civil service reform and a re-evaluation of the "Koch Plan" of 1978-1979 was brought up. The high cost of disability provisions for police officers and firefighters were mentioned by a number of city officials.

Other issues that were of concern were little flexibility in "close bids," that is, the inability to award a contract to someone who has done a good job in the past but bid a little too high; election reform; and local option for police tours of duty.

Other Issues

One very serious problem which has caught up with all local governments in the state is the deterioration of the capital facilities in the state. These include water lines, roads, bridges and jails, to give a few examples. In order to deal with the fiscal crunch they are facing, local governments have put off capital maintenance and new construction unless serious problems occur. This deferred maintenance program has not only caught up with local government, but the costs of repair are now much greater than if a continued maintenance program had been followed. Not only are the effects of these actions detrimental to the citizens of the state but the repercussions can and will be felt in other areas, such as economic development. This is a serious problem with a solution that can only be found in close state-local government cooperation.

Specific Public Services

Of the broad range of public services offered by county, town, village and city governments in New York, four were chosen for detailed examination. These are public health, fire protection, police protection and highways. The same basic approach was used in interviewing officials and professionals in these four service areas as was used to gather the information reported in the previous section. The primary objective was to find out how the state could assist them in reducing costs and providing their services more efficiently. Again, all those contacted were extremely interested in the objective of this study and were more than willing to express their ideas and concerns.

Public Health Services

The provision of public health programs is a responsibility shared jointly by the state and local governments. The 57 counties outside of New York City provide varying levels of health services to their residents. There are 33 counties which have full-time health agencies and these are known as organized counties. There are 24 counties in which no health department has been established. These are known as unorganized counties. In these unorganized counties, health services are the responsibility of State Health Department district offices.

The functions and services performed by local health departments fall into two general categories -- regulation and direct services. These activities range from animal disease control to dental health, environmental sanitation, health education, nursing services, prevention, laboratory services, and supervision of volunteer work.

Thirteen public health officials and professionals were interviewed. These individuals were county health commissioners, nursing service directors, state public health association officers, and local health administrators. They came from both large and small counties and organized and unorganized county staffs.

The one issue that was most often repeated was that of the wide variance in public health programs being offered across the state. Probably no county provides the same level of health service as any other. Many were wondering if anyone really does know what is being provided in terms of health care in each county from volunteer, private, and public health agencies. There was concern expressed over the fact that there is no minimum level of services required for each county.

The second most mentioned issue was that of the performance of the State Health Department. The State Health Department was a much respected agency by local officials until the last 10 to 15 years. Now people agree that professionalism has given way to a very political agency which is more interested in monitoring and policing than it is in providing health services and assistance to the people of New York. Those surveyed felt that public health decisions were being made by accountants on a fiscal basis rather than by qualified health professionals on a "people" basis. Many of those interviewed said frankly that many State Health Department personnel were unqualified for their jobs. It was also felt that the Health Department district offices which once played a lead role in health services, are lacking in their ability to serve their districts. Of all State Departments covered by this study, the State Health Department received the most unfavorable comments, even more than the often criticized Department of Environmental Conservation. Local officials hoped that a dialogue could be started between the State Health Department and local health agencies. Instead of the adversary role, which has developed, local officials would like to see common goals stated and more local input into state decisions affecting health services.

Among the more specific suggestions made by local health officers was more assistance in recruiting physicians for the smaller and more rural counties. Many officials mentioned the difficulty of finding qualified people. They saw salary levels and the civil service as being impediments to this. The small unorganized counties asked for more assistance from the state. County legislatures in these unorganized areas were often reluctant to get involved in new programs which were needed because of the expense. Also of concern was state aid reductions. Counties which do become involved in programs find that state aid is reduced after a period of time and they are left with the expense of continuing the service. These state cutbacks often leave unanticipated costs for the county. Since there is no certainty of state aid or reimbursements, long-term planning is an uncertain exercise. The issues of mandates and lack of funding for mandates were also brought up by many of those interviewed.

Some areas where cost reduction could be achieved were mentioned. One of these was the need to look at alternatives to nursing home or hospital care for older people. Alternatives which would be less costly included day care, home care, family homes, and "respite" care. The alternative of contracting for services received mixed reviews. Some felt that it is a cost-saving measure because they do not have to hire new employees, while others felt that they lose control and direct contact with participants. Several officials suggested that a common set of indicators for evaluating objectives and performance should be developed.

Strong agreement was expressed for prevention and health education programs. Substantial cost reductions could occur if more emphasis were put on these programs.

Many counties are now utilizing more volunteers to help in clinics of various types and in special projects. The use of volunteers supervised by staff members has proven to be quite successful.

State assistance from specialists located in district offices has decreased. Many counties cannot afford to employ specialists and often must rely on neighboring counties or the state for assistance.

The practice of charging fees for certain services is on the increase. This is an important revenue source which local officials expect will see greater use in the future. Some people mentioned problems with the current state/local formula for dividing these fees. They felt that the state share was disproportionately large since the county does most of the work in many cases.

Finally, there were several comments over problems stemming from division of responsibility among the three state agencies involved in public health. These are the Health Department, the Department of Environmental Conservation, and the Department of Agriculture and Markets. The involvement of all three of these agencies in local health services sometimes causes confusion and conflicts.

Fire Services

Fire protection in New York State is provided by a diverse group of arrangements. In cities and villages, fire protection is most commonly provided by a municipal fire department, composed either of paid or volunteer firefighters or a combination of both. Unlike villages and cities, towns do not directly provide fire protection services. Generally, fire services in towns is provided either by a fire district or a fire protection district. Counties do not provide direct fire protection services, but they do provide valuable auxiliary services. The county fire coordinator, appointed by the county's legislative body, has responsibility for coordinating mutual aid responses by fire departments within the county. Some counties maintain specialized firefighting equipment and make it available to all fire departments in the county. ^{1/}

^{1/} N. Y. Department of State, Local Government Handbook, 1976.

The fire prevention network in New York State is a strong and well organized association. The major fire fighting associations in the state are members of the Joint Fire Service Council. This council coordinates activities and develops legislative priorities, as well as provides for dialogue between the member associations.

The Department of State's Office of Fire Prevention and Control is a well respected and helpful agency. Its role is to provide training and technical assistance to local fire departments, as well as to implement new fire protection legislation and administer the State Fire Data Reporting System. Only positive statements were made about this agency by those interviewed.

Ten fire protection professionals were interviewed. All of them were firefighters. A number of these individuals were fire chiefs. Many were also presidents of their respective associations, such as the Association of Fire Chiefs, Joint Fire Service Council, County Fire Coordinators, and Association of Fire Districts.

All of those interviewed were pleased with the assistance and cooperation they received from the state. The passage of the new arson legislation was mentioned. Also mentioned was the new Uniform Fire Prevention and Building Code Act; several of those interviewed expressed the need for assistance from the state to comply with this new legislation. Agreement was expressed for the state to fund new bills and to continue to support those already implemented.

There were a number of suggestions made relating to productivity improvement in fire protection. One issue was the need for better communication between the fire department, building code officials, and builders. A suggestion was made to combine building code and fire departments into one unit so as to reduce costs and provide better service. Another suggestion was made for intermunicipal agreements for code enforcement.

There was substantial agreement on the need for more cooperative arrangements between local governments. While mutual aid arrangements exist and work well and there is joint purchase of equipment, many of those interviewed would like to see these types of cooperation expanded. Suggestions were made for arrangements for sharing costs and cooperative agreements for whole fire departments among neighboring local areas, from the town, city or village to the county. Some of those interviewed thought legislative authorization for a town to have a fire department or to jointly administer one with another town or village would provide substantial cost savings, especially in rural areas.

Using volunteer fire departments is an approach that some local officials thought needs more study. There are a number of both direct and indirect costs and management problems which need to be analyzed. Contracting for fire protection with a private company was also mentioned as a viable alternative for some areas. There are some services which are now contracted for, for example, the Electrical Underwriters Board does inspections for some local governments.

Some of those interviewed were doubtful that they could achieve any type of cost reduction or greater efficiencies because of the unions. Also, some local officials thought that productivity improvement programs may not be successful because they go against traditional methods of doing things.

Two other areas in which the state could be of assistance to local fire departments are help in improving local mutual-aid communication systems, and more support for fire prevention education programs, which many feel is the single most important concern in fire protection services.

Police Services

The need for close working relationships among city, town and village police, and the State Police, is plainly evident. Protection of life and property is one of the oldest local functions. The mutual agreements which have developed between local police departments is one built out of necessity, not just economics. Many of these arrangements help to hold down costs for local governments. Law enforcement is one area in which contractual arrangements among local governments have become commonplace.

Twelve law enforcement professionals were interviewed as part of this study. They included sheriffs, police chiefs, association officers, and State Police service specialists.

As with fire protection, law enforcement is a public service area that has developed over time into a well-organized operation. Many of the problems have been worked out over time, and there are strong law enforcement fraternal organizations.

A great deal of support was offered for the Division of Criminal Justice Services in the Executive Department. Those interviewed felt that the division is doing a satisfactory job. There was a great deal of concern when it was rumored that the Division of Criminal Justice Services might be dismantled. Those surveyed felt, though, that there could be some improvement in the technical assistance provided by the state, especially in legal matters.

One concern which was expressed was the loss of the Federal Law Enforcement Administration Agency (LEAA). Some local law enforcement agencies were utilizing these grants and although not a great loss, it was a setback. One particular area in which the LEAA money was being used was for the completion of a statewide radio district plan. This plan would improve police communications by standardizing radio frequencies into common channels among the police departments in a county. This would greatly increase the efficiency of law enforcement. Hope was expressed for continued state funding to complete this project.

Another area in which those interviewed thought state assistance is needed is in police training. Adequate local funding does not now exist for police training programs. What has been proposed is a "penalty

assessment" which would be added to fines of convicted individuals to be used for training. This type of program has proved to be quite successful in California. At present, police training is done in a decentralized fashion in 13 training districts across the state. Many of the local law enforcement professionals interviewed were satisfied with this arrangement because it allowed them to meet the standards set by the state, as well as the particular needs of their area. The possibility of a centralized training institute was brought up but this met with mixed reactions. Some individuals did state that it would be interesting to see a study comparing these two training approaches. There was total agreement that this training should not be run by the State Police.

There were a number of labor issues mentioned. One problem raised was that of unions and labor negotiations. Those interviewed felt that this was a costly and time-consuming process. Scheduling of duty and the amount of time an officer is allowed to work are problems which add costs and restrict training activities. The new laws concerning hiring individuals with past stress or handicapped related problems are a concern, especially as they relate to disability payments, which are already a major expense for local governments. Another issue raised concerns the problem of lateral entry of police officers. It appears that civil service regulations makes it difficult for officers to shift from one police department to another.

The reaction to questions about consolidation was mixed. There are a number of examples of consolidation of police departments across the state. These include Rensselaer County, Town of Manlius, Putnam County, Schatea-Glenville, Sloan-Cheektowaga and Erie County. The objection to consolidation was loss of local control. The level of law enforcement in communities is established by the residents of that community, and many people do not want to lose this local responsiveness. Some of those interviewed felt that the higher costs associated with not consolidating were outweighed by loss of local control that results from consolidation. It seems that the debate over what is best will continue.

There was some concern expressed over the need for assistance from the state to help clarify mutual aid agreements. While mutual aid agreements exist and appear to be successful, there is some confusion over liability in case of personal injury while assisting another community. It would appear that some of the specifics of these mutual aid agreements should be reviewed in greater detail.

Another debate in which the state could assist local governments is that between peace officer/constable and the police officer. More communities are using peace officer/constables, and many professional police officers are concerned, since these individuals are not as well trained and do not meet the same qualifications as police officers. There is also a push for studying and utilizing volunteer police to cut costs. These are both issues in which state agencies could assist local officials in understanding the cost and benefits.

Some other specific issues which were raised include lack of jail space, the reimbursement rate which the state pays local government for certain law enforcement activities, such as housing prisoners, and

waterway use and boating associated fines and registrations, and the armored vests reimbursement program.

Finally, some of those interviewed thought that it would be helpful if the state could provide a guaranteed supply of gasoline. Also, studies of pilot projects on alternative fuels for police vehicles would be worthwhile.

Highways and Streets

Street and highway maintenance presents a picture of shared, overlapping responsibility. Within a town, for example, there may be as many as four governmental units involved in road construction and maintenance: the state, the county, the town, and, frequently, a village. The state has responsibility for the state and interstate highway systems. County governments maintain the county road system. The degree which counties actually perform maintenance on the county road system varies. Towns maintain a variety of town roads, including highways, residential streets, and unpaved single-lane roadways. Cities and villages maintain many miles of residential and commercial streets, including what are essentially continuations of state, county, and town highways. There exists a great deal of mutual cooperation among highway departments in such things as jointly purchased equipment, shared equipment, and labor exchange. Also, there are formal contracts between governments, for example, many towns maintain state and county highways under contract.

Highway departments are often the single largest budget item for local governments. Many think that the large number of local governments in the state have led to great inefficiencies in the highway system. It seems that everyone has concluded this, but what is needed now are the facts and figures to back up these statements.

Four county and town highway superintendents were interviewed, plus a professor at Cornell who has a great deal of expertise in this area. This number was smaller than for the other service areas, because all the highway superintendents were away from their offices because of summer projects. Some agreed that highway departments were expensive for local governments to operate, but thought that changing the status quo and reorganizing would be even worse. The familiar stories of driving a snow plow down a town road and, upon reaching a county road, picking up the blade and driving to the next town road were told. But the arguments against consolidating road services run deep. "If we consolidate, what happens to my workers? What happens to me?" was a common statement expressed by the highway superintendents interviewed. Would there be cost savings? If one thing was apparent, it was that assistance was needed from the state in conducting studies of consolidation to review present expenses and to determine what savings could occur from reorganization and how the transfer of equipment and personnel would be handled.

Another issue of concern was the decline of roads, bridges, sidewalks, and other infrastructure over time. The reduction in state aid has led to less maintenance over time. This gradual deterioration of

infrastructure is finally catching up with local governments and has become expensive. Some type of action is needed soon.

Contracting for services has been tried and is often used. Bidding is sometimes a problem; and several of those interviewed said it would be easier just to hire a contractor to do the work. It was mentioned that some local governments hire private contractors to do all their highway maintenance and do not even own a highway department.

In general, comments about relations with the State Department of Transportation were good. It was suggested that pooling gasoline and diesel fuel purchases with the state or other local governments might result in cheaper prices and better supplies.

A great many informal arrangements exist among local governments for use of equipment and personnel. One alternative for increasing cooperation was for equipment pools to be maintained by the state or by counties for local highway departments to draw upon.

There were a number of favorable comments made about the highway superintendent's school run at Cornell University.

Local Government and Computers

In the face of increasing fiscal pressures, new directives from Washington, DC on the role of state and local government, and the need to plan to accommodate changes in community service levels, local government decision makers must have improved sources of and access to information. Currently a great deal of work is proceeding nationwide in this area. The major thrust of this research is to adapt the new small computer technology to the needs of local government. New software packages as well as technical expertise is available in state and local government, universities and private computer firms in New York State and elsewhere in the country. To meet the future local governments must update their management information systems to provide more efficient and economic delivery of services. The information systems private business has developed and successfully utilized is now available to local government to improve their service delivery. A study should be undertaken to establish the current state-of-the-art in local government computer technology, the current status of technology among local governments in New York State, technology transfer possibilities, the development of a pilot project utilizing this technology, and educational and assistance programs.